



A journal for restless minds

THE LOSS OF VIRTUE

Our original sin

CATHOLICISM À LA CARTE

Choosing what to believe (Continued)

PURA VIDA

Living the good life

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

The Loss Of Virtue

Our ongoing original sin

While it may, in many ways, be the best of times, one might be more disposed to argue the point, even to go so far as to suggest it may be the worst of them. What is severely lacking, it seems, is the truly virtuous soul, for such a soul must of necessity have a clear, unambiguous, more vigorous concept of the nature of virtue than is currently found acceptable.

For most moderns, virtue is a by-gone antiquated notion, replaced or removed to obsolescence by the liberal ideologies of progressivism and progress, individualism and the individual; which is to say for modern man virtue is the satisfaction of man's insatiable appetite for more provided by man's progressive genius to produce ever more than is required. *"Instead of disparaging the tendency to want more than we need, liberals like Adam Smith argued that needs varied from one*

*society to another, that civilized men and women needed more than savages to make them comfortable, and that a continual re-definition of their standards of comfort and convenience led to improvement in production and a general increase in wealth."*²

For seventeenth century poet and polemicist, John Milton, virtue referred not to the disinterested service of the public good but to the courage, vitality, and life-giving force emanating from the creator of the universe. To Milton, virtue was associated both with the blessings conferred on us by God and the recognition that life itself is a gift from our Creator, not something we have the power to shape to our own purposes.

Similarly, eighteenth century philosopher and Protestant theologian, Jonathan Edwards, believed that gratitude was owed by man to a higher power. To Edwards, ingratitude—the refusal to acknowledge limits on human powers, the wish to achieve godlike knowledge and capacities—became the antithesis of



CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Pura Vida

Living the good life

On a recent trip to Costa Rica I was introduced to a wonderful phrase, "Pura Vida" which in English translates to "Pure Life". *Pura Vida* is perhaps the most common phrase heard throughout the country, used to express such thoughts as "take it easy", "enjoy life", "all good", "hello", "goodbye", "this is life", "later" and many, many more.

And yet, there is a much deeper meaning to the phrase *Pura Vida*! To Costa Ricans, *Pura Vida* embodies the thought that no matter what your current situation may be, life for someone else can always be less fortunate than your own; that perhaps you should consider that maybe, just maybe, your situation isn't all that bad and that no matter how little or how much you have in life, we are all here together, we are all brothers and sisters to each other.

Eighty percent of the population of Costa Rica is Catholic and as you might expect, there are plenty of churches to go around, you never have to walk far to find one. One, in particular, where we attended Sunday Mass, had the most unique altar I have ever seen. The base was constructed from a huge stone with a small flat surface on one end and a large sacrificial lamb draped over the other. The meaning could not have been clearer or more profound: Christ, the Lamb of God, the Pascal sacrifice

lay before us, a clear reminder of what the Son of God did for us.

The imagery of sheep and shepherds who watch over them permeates the entire bible, it is perhaps the most common theme. From Genesis, chapter 4, Abel was a shepherd who was slain by his own brother Cain. The first to hear of the birth of Christ were shepherds watching their flocks by night. Jesus is called the Lamb of God and, as we hear in today's Gospel, he calls himself the Good Shepherd.



Why are shepherds so important to our understanding of our Lord, Jesus Christ? What is the meaning behind the metaphor?

Let's face it, sheep are not known for being exceptionally smart. Here is a question for you: "If there were 100 sheep in a pasture and one jumped over the fence and escaped, how many would be

left?" Now this is not a difficult question to answer, especially if you have ever been around sheep and their shepherds. While the most obvious answer is "Ninety nine", almost any shepherd will tell you "There would be none left. Sheep are so dumb they would just follow the one who jumped over the fence."

Now, while we may not be just a flock of "dumb sheep", we most certainly have all done some dumb things and made some dumb decisions in our lives. No matter how smart we may be, all of us have made mistakes, we have all acted inappropriately at times.

Like the 90-year-old woman who had just married for the fourth time. When asked who the four men were to whom she had been married, she said, "Well, in my twenties I married a banker, in my forties I married a ring master at the circus, in my sixties I married a preacher, and now in my nineties I married a funeral director." When asked why she chose men of such varied careers she replied, "Oh, that's easy. I married one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go." Perhaps not the most noble of reasons.

We all generally have good intentions in dealing with life, other people, or in living the beliefs and values which we profess, and yet, all too often, we find ourselves compromising, not living up to what we believe or in dealing fairly with others.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

When we reflect on how easily and often we have gone astray in our lives, it should be obvious we could use some guidance, that we need a shepherd to stay with us, to lead us, encourage us, and to heal us when we are in pain or suffering. Not just an ordinary shepherd but a Good Shepherd, one who won't leave us when life gets tough, when the wolves of misfortune, envy, loneliness, addiction, discontent, insecurity, or poor judgment attack. Jesus offers us a comparison between the good shepherd and a mere hired hand. The good shepherd cares about the sheep. The hired hand is concerned only for himself, in getting paid. When wolves come, the hired hand simply runs away.

For us, imagine that all you possess—honors, looks, home, car, reputation, career, money, respect, pleasure, youth, you name it—have “handles” for you to grab onto and to hold on tight. These “handles” quickly turn our hearts to stone, we begin to hear the voices of greed telling us that anything and everything is up for grabs, that we can have it all. Greed becomes the one and only virtue; it is the hired hand's way of life.

But, not everything has a handle on it. Real love has no handles, nothing to grasp or grip; love lets go, receives humbly, gives freely.

All that you have and all that you are is but a gift from God. If you open your heart and your hands God will pour into them all that you could ever need. Keep them open and you allow

your gifts to pass on to others in need.

God loves us, no matter what happens in our lives. It makes no difference whether we want it, whether we ask for it, or whether we believe that we deserve it, He still loves us. We are His children; He created us in his image. Henri Nouwen once said that “*we are not loved by God because we are precious, but we are precious because we are loved by God.*”

True love does not come from within; it comes from God. You cannot know love through the external; it cannot be found in a book or a lecture; it must be experienced by living and loving God. We live in a world that has little time for God, little time for love; it is because we know so little of God that we fail to find true love.

Jesus tells us, “*I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.*” To be a Christian means we belong to Christ, the good shepherd, and it means we belong together, not as individuals, but as one flock, one community of believers who share in the body of Christ and our love for one another.

A soul that loves is always empty because it has given everything away. That is why the Good Shepherd can lay down his life for the sheep. That is why the Father loves the Son and those who follow him. Amen.

Homily for the
Fourth Sunday of Easter (B)
Acts 4:8-12
1 John 3:1-2
John 10:11-18

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press
2007, 82 pages.

Society and Sanity

Frank Sheed

Sheed & Ward, New York
1953, 270 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Co.
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life
Editor: R. R. Reno
Ten Issues per year.
www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity
Editor: James M. Kushiner
Bi-Monthly.
www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith
Editor: Tim Ryland
Bi-Monthly.
www.catholic.com

virtue and the essence of original sin.

In the nineteenth century, a time when the progress of human ingenuity seemed to promise a decisive victory over fate, writers such as Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson reminded readers that human beings did not control their own fate, that fate could only be conquered by man's grateful acceptance of a world not made solely for human enjoyment. According to Emerson, man's defiance of fate amounted to a form of tax evasion, an attempt to get something for nothing.

For William James spiritual "desiccation," as he put it, posed a greater danger to the modern world than religious fanaticism, superstition, and intolerance—the "bogey" of those who believed that progress ought to enable man to outgrow his childish need for religion.

There are others, of course, who have spoken of the lasting and deleterious impact of progressivism's promotion of man's genius over divine providence. Nevertheless, we steadfastly refuse to read the fine print, caring not for such minutiae, dismissing the progressive's screed as so much rant and bother, signifying nothing. Our deliberate ignorance will yet be the death of us as it has now, it would appear, been the death of God.

What the progressive decries most of all is our dependence upon God to satisfy the spiritual hunger of our souls. The progressive finds no evidence for either soul or God and so looks to satisfy man's physical wants,

which are insatiable desires. Yet, as it is written, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:1-4).

Our desiccation has left us spiritually starving; the world can never satisfy the needs of the soul. We are starving our souls bit by bit, through compromise, ambivalence and equivocation.

Commandments have become options, laws are to be broken or ignored, obligations are choices—choose a, b, c, or none of the above—, morality is passé, values are whatever you choose, truth is what you make of it, reality is what you wish it.

Here now, let us once again pause and take up again the aside begun last week.

Catholicism À La Carte

Choosing what to believe

(Continued)

As for the assertion that the Catholic Church's anti-control stance against women "is based on dogma alone," it would do well to first clearly and accurately understand the difference between *doctrine* and *dogma* and what is required of the Catholic faithful. With respect to doctrine, the Catholic Church differs from our Protestant brothers and sisters in

that for the majority of Protestant denominations doctrine is contained in 'sola scriptura' that is within Scripture alone.

Doctrine, for our purposes here, may be defined as the teachings of the Catholic Church in matters of faith and morals; Catholic Church doctrine is derived from Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the teachings of the magisterium, consisting of the bishops in union with the pope. All Catholics are directed to follow and adhere to the doctrine of the Church.

Dogma is more narrowly defined as that part of doctrine which has been divinely revealed and which the Church has formally defined and declared to be believed as revealed.

"The Church's magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes, in a form obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith, truths contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes, in a definitive way, truths having a necessary connection with these" (CCC § 88).

It should be made absolutely and perfectly clear that "scientific evidence" holds no standing when determining church doctrine pertaining to matters of faith and morals. Science cannot provide evidence concerning morality or faith; that is to say science cannot be called upon to serve as the final arbiter in such matters. God, represented by his Church here on earth, makes those decisions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

As for moral clarity, what the writer implies or suggests is that morality is relative, defined by each person to be what he or she desires it to be. Relative morality is nonsense and in and of itself completely devoid of clarity. It can and does produce only chaos, for it subscribes to the whims and vagaries of individual desires, wishes, and preferences.

With respect to the Catholic Church's position on birth control and contraception there is absolutely no ambiguity as to either her position or the sources from which such a position has been derived. The following is a reprint from Catholic Answers. It has been reviewed, found free of doctrinal or moral errors, and thus has been granted the Imprimatur by the Bishop of San Diego and the Catholic Church.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued his landmark encyclical letter Humanae Vitae (Latin, "Human Life"), which reemphasized the Church's constant teaching that it is always intrinsically wrong to use contraception to prevent new human beings from coming into existence.

Contraception is "any action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act [sexual intercourse], or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" (Humanae Vitae 14). This includes sterilization, condoms and other barrier methods, spermicides, coitus interruptus (withdrawal method), the Pill, and all other such methods.

The Historic Christian Teaching

Few realize that up until 1930, all Protestant denominations agreed

with the Catholic Church's teaching condemning contraception as sinful. At its 1930 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Church, swayed by growing social pressure, announced that contraception would be allowed in some circumstances. Soon the Anglican Church completely caved in, allowing contraception across the board. Since then, all other Protestant denominations have followed suit. Today, the Catholic Church alone proclaims the historic Christian position on contraception.

Evidence that contraception is in conflict with God's laws comes from a variety of sources that will be examined in this tract.

Nature

Contraception is wrong because it's a deliberate violation of the design God built into the human race, often referred to as "natural law." The natural law purpose of sex is procreation. The pleasure that sexual intercourse provides is an additional blessing from God, intended to offer the possibility of new life while strengthening the bond of intimacy, respect, and love between husband and wife. The loving environment this bond creates is the perfect setting for nurturing children.

But sexual pleasure within marriage becomes unnatural, and even harmful to the spouses, when it is used in a way that deliberately excludes the basic purpose of sex, which is procreation. God's gift of the sex act, along with its pleasure and intimacy, must not be abused by deliberately frustrating its natural end—procreation.

Scripture

Is contraception a modern invention? Hardly! Birth control has been around for millennia. Scrolls found in Egypt, dating to 1900 B.C., describe ancient methods of birth control that were later practiced in

the Roman empire during the apostolic age. Wool that absorbed sperm, poisons that fumigated the uterus, potions, and other methods were used to prevent conception. In some centuries, even condoms were used (though made out of animal skin rather than latex).

The Bible mentions at least one form of contraception specifically and condemns it. Coitus interruptus, was used by Onan to avoid fulfilling his duty according to the ancient Jewish law of fathering children for one's dead brother. "Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.' But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him also" (Gen. 38:8–10).

The biblical penalty for not giving your brother's widow children was public humiliation, not death (Deut. 25:7–10). But Onan received death as punishment for his crime. This means his crime was more than simply not fulfilling the duty of a brother-in-law. He lost his life because he violated natural law, as Jewish and Christian commentators have always understood. For this reason, certain forms of contraception have historically been known as "Onanism," after the man who practiced it, just as homosexuality has historically been known as "Sodomy," after the men of Sodom, who practiced that vice (cf. Gen. 19).

Contraception was so far outside the biblical mindset and so obviously wrong

that it did not need the frequent condemnations other sins did. Scripture condemns the practice when it mentions it. Once a moral principle has been established in the Bible, every possible application of it need not be mentioned. For example, the general principle that theft is wrong was clearly established in Scripture; but there's no need to provide an exhaustive list of every kind of theft. Similarly, since the principle that contraception is wrong has been established by being condemned when it's mentioned in the Bible, every particular form of contraception does not need to be dealt with in Scripture in order for us to see that it is condemned.

Apostolic Tradition

The biblical teaching that birth control is wrong is found even more explicitly among the Church Fathers, who recognized the biblical and natural law principles underlying the condemnation.

In A.D. 195, Clement of Alexandria wrote, "Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted" (The Instructor of Children 2:10:91:2).

Hippolytus of Rome wrote in 255 that "on account of their prominent ancestry and great property, the so-called faithful [certain Christian women who had affairs with male servants] want no children from slaves or lowborn commoners, [so] they use drugs of sterility or bind themselves tightly in order to expel a fetus which has already been engendered" (Refutation of All Heresies 9:12).

Around 307 Lactantius explained that some "complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as

though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife" (Divine Institutes 6:20).

The First Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council and the one that defined Christ's divinity, declared in 325, "If anyone in sound health has castrated himself, it behooves that such a one, if enrolled among the clergy, should cease [from his ministry], and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who willfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians, or by their masters, and should otherwise be found worthy, such men this canon admits to the clergy" (Canon 1).

Augustine wrote in 419, "I am supposing, then, although you are not lying [with your wife] for the sake of procreating offspring, you are not for the sake of lust obstructing their procreation by an evil prayer or an evil deed. Those who do this, although they are called husband and wife, are not; nor do they retain any reality of marriage, but with a respectable name cover a shame. Sometimes this lustful cruelty, or cruel lust, comes to this, that they even procure poisons of sterility [oral contraceptives]" (Marriage and Concupiscence 1:15:17).

The apostolic tradition's condemnation of contraception is so great that it was followed by Protestants until 1930 and was upheld by all key Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther said, "[T]he exceedingly foul deed of Onan, the basest of wretches . . . is a most disgraceful sin. It is far

more atrocious than incest and adultery. We call it unchastity, yes, a sodomitic sin. For Onan goes in to her; that is, he lies with her and copulates, and when it comes to the point of insemination, spills the semen, lest the woman conceive. Surely at such a time the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed. Accordingly, it was a most disgraceful crime. . . . Consequently, he deserved to be killed by God. He committed an evil deed. Therefore, God punished him."

John Calvin said, "The voluntary spilling of semen outside of intercourse between man and woman is a monstrous thing. Deliberately to withdraw from coitus in order that semen may fall on the ground is doubly monstrous. For this is to extinguish the hope of the race and to kill before he is born the hoped-for offspring."

John Wesley warned, "Those sins that dishonor the body are very displeasing to God, and the evidence of vile affections. Observe, the thing which he [Onan] did displeased the Lord—and it is to be feared; thousands, especially of single persons, by this very thing, still displease the Lord, and destroy their own souls." (These passages are quoted in Charles D. Provan, *The Bible and Birth Control*, which contains many quotes by historic Protestant figures who recognize contraception's evils.)

The Magisterium

The Church also, fulfilling the role given it by Christ as the identifier and interpreter of apostolic Scripture and apostolic tradition, has constantly condemned contraception as gravely sinful.

In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI stated, "[W]e must once again declare that the

direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and, above all, directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit means of regulating birth. Equally to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman. Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" (HV 14).

This was reiterated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "[E]very action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil" (CCC 2370). "Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means . . . for example, direct sterilization or contraception" (CCC 2399).

The Church also has affirmed that the illicitness of contraception is an infallible doctrine: "The Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraception, that is, of every marital act intentionally rendered unfruitful. This teaching is to be held as definitive and irreformable. Contraception is gravely opposed to marital chastity, it is contrary to the good of the transmission of life (the procreative aspect of matrimony), and to the reciprocal self-giving of the spouses (the unitive aspect of matrimony); it harms true love and denies the sovereign role of God in the transmission of human

life" (*Vademecum for Confessors* 2:4, Feb. 12, 1997).

Human Experience

Pope Paul VI predicted grave consequences that would arise from the widespread and unrestrained use of contraception. He warned, "Upright men can even better convince themselves of the solid grounds on which the teaching of the Church in this field is based if they care to reflect upon the consequences of methods of artificially limiting the increase of children. Let them consider, first of all, how wide and easy a road would thus be opened up towards conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality. Not much experience is needed in order to know human weakness, and to understand that men—especially the young, who are so vulnerable on this point—have need of encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so that they must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anti-conceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion" (HV 17).

No one can doubt the fulfillment of these prophetic words. They have all been more than fulfilled in this country as a result of the widespread availability of contraceptives, the "free love" movement that started in the 1960s, and the loose sexual morality that it spawned and that continues to pervade Western culture.

Indeed, recent studies reveal a far greater divorce rate in marriages in which contraception is regularly practiced than

in those marriages where it is not. Experience, natural law, Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium, all testify to the moral evil of contraception.

Wishful Thinking

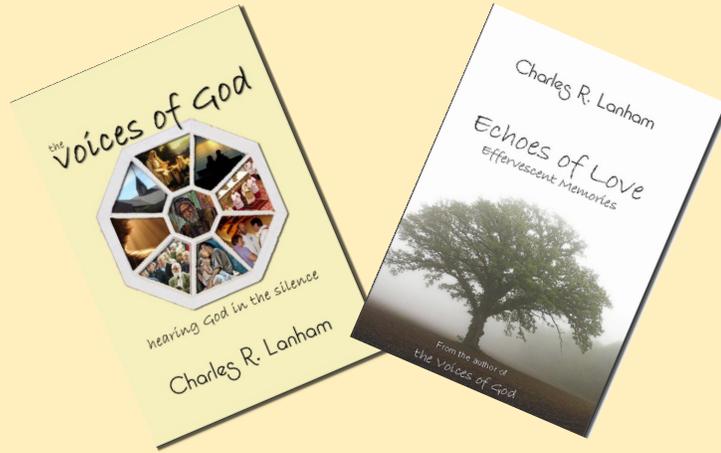
Ignoring the mountain of evidence, some maintain that the Church considers the use of contraception a matter for each married couple to decide according to their "individual conscience." Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. The Church has always maintained the historic Christian teaching that deliberate acts of contraception are always gravely sinful, which means that it is mortally sinful if done with full knowledge and deliberate consent (CCC 1857). This teaching cannot be changed and has been taught by the Church infallibly.

There is no way to deny the fact that the Church has always and everywhere condemned artificial contraception. The matter has already been infallibly decided. The so-called "individual conscience" argument amounts to "individual disobedience."

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.
Bernadeane Carr, STL, Censor Librorum, August 10, 2004

IMPRIMATUR: In accord with 1983 CIC 827 permission to publish this work is hereby granted.
+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, August 10, 2004

To Be Continued ...



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